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SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - MARCH 18

¶1. (U) The items contained in this report consist principally of spot information from various sources. This report is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained therein be confirmed at this time.

¶2. (SBU) During a March 16 briefing, MONUC Goma noted that Uruguayan reinforcements will be sent to the Pinga area, and that of the estimated 1,600 FDLR in North Kivu, no fewer than 500 are in and around Pinga (Note: Later discussions as to why Pinga is seemingly so important centered on the fact that there are mines nearby and that it is on the axis leading to Walikale's mines. There was also an FDLR attack on Pinga on March 11-12. End note).

¶3. (SBU) It was reported that the FARDC is not making itself popular with the local population. In Kamituga, illegal barriers have been set up by the FARDC to tax everyone coming to and from the market. In Fizi, the four barriers that have been set up are a joint FARDC-Mai Mai operation. MONUC Deputy Chief of Staff Lt. Colonel Cunliffe stated forcefully at the briefing that these and other illegal barriers must be removed by MONUC and that simply reporting their existence was not acceptable.

¶4. (SBU) In Katanga village, there was reportedly an argument between FARDC soldiers and three FDLR cadres, which resulted in the killing of the FDLR fighters and their bodies being dragged through the streets in front the entire assembled community. In addition, civilian sources sent to the MONUC base there relayed that the FDLR will attack MONUC, and are armed with multiple rocket launchers. It is believed that FDLR is testing MONUC reaction times. Separately, the 22 houses burned and the two rapes committed by FDLR in Bunyakiri a few weeks ago have been confirmed by way of a letter submitted by the local customary chief.

¶5. (U) Quoting a MONUC military spokesperson, a local press article reports that MONUC is launching joint operations with the FARDC against the FDLR. Separately, local press has also reported that civil society in Lubero has sounded the alarm with respect to growing insecurity in the territory, marked by killings of civilians, burning of homes, and looting, which they attribute to the FDLR.

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